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William Peter Kaldis



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Background for Conflict: Greece, Turkey, and the Aegean Islands, 1912-1914

William Peter Kaldis

Ohio University

Ronald John Lagoe

Ohio University

The question of the Aegean islands forms an important and neglected juncture in the development of international affairs. Combining Balkan antagonisms, great power rivalries, arms races, and the beginning of war in Europe, the issue confounded diplomats, politicians, and military leaders.

The numerous islands which divide Greece and Turkey comprise various groupings. The Cyclades, containing Naxos, Andros, Thera, Paros, Melos, Tenos, Mykonos, and a host of lesser isles, lie directly east of the Hellenic Peloponnesus. The Northern Sporades, including Skiathos, Skyros, and Alonnisos, are located off central Greece. The Protocol of London, signed on February 3, 1830, incorporated both of these archipelagos into the Hellenic state. Between 1830 and 1912 they remained under Athens' control. Hellenic aspirations focused on Crete where, although sons of the Greek king served as governors, the island enjoyed autonomy within the Ottoman Empire.¹

Two other Greek inhabited archipelagos, the Dodecanese, or Southern Sporades, and the Eastern Sporades, remained within the Ottoman Empire throughout the nineteenth century. The former grouping, including Rhodes, Kos, and a number of other

¹ S. T. Lascaris, Diplomatike Istoria tes Ellados 1821-1914 (Athens: Tzaka-Dellagramatika, 1947); Alexander Soutsos (ed.) Sylloge ton eis eksoterikon Demosion Dikaion tes Ellados Anagomenon episeimon Engraphon (Athens: n.p., 1872), pp. 129-37; Panagiotis K. Kriaris, Istoria tes Kretes apo ton Archaioyton mechri ton Kath'emas Chronon, 4 vols. (Athens: A. D. Phrantzeskake, 1930); Basilios Psilakes, Istoria tes Kretes apo tes apotates archaiotetus mechri ton Kath'emas chronon, 3 vols. (Chania: Neas Erevnes, 1909).

isles, enjoyed a measure of autonomy inside the bounds of the Turkish realm. The Eastern Sporades, comprising Lemnos, Samothrace, Chios, Mytilene, and their neighbors, lay along the coast of Asia Minor and the mouth of the Dardanelles.

As the nineteenth century progressed, the Greek state, inspired by the so-called Megale Idea, attempted to annex all Hellenic-inhabited areas. Athens concentrated its efforts on acquiring Thessaly, Macedonia, and Crete from the Porte, but neglected the Southern and Eastern Sporades.²

Only with the coming of the twentieth century did Greek aspirations turn toward these islands. In the course of its 1911-1912 war with Turkey, Italy occupied the Dodecanese. By terms of the October 1912 Treaty of Lausanne, which ended the struggle, Rome acquired Tripoli and promised to return the archipelago as soon as the Porte evacuated the province.³ The Italian occupation of the Southern Sporades thwarted Hellenic efforts to acquire those territories, yet they provoked no Greek move to seize the remaining Ottoman-held Aegean islands. Shortly after Rome took the Dodecanese, Athens signed a diplomatic alliance with Bulgaria. Again, however, the object of the pact was not the Aegean, but Turkish Macedonia. In October 1912, Greece joined with the Bulgars, Serbs, and Montenegrins in a war for the conquest of the remainder of Turkey in Europe.⁴ Athens' interest in the Aegean had once more become

² C. D. and Isabelle Bridge Booth, Italy's Aegean Possessions (London: Arrowsmith, n.d.), pp. 195-233; Lascaris, Diplomatike Istoria, pp. 83-225.

³ Giovanni Giolitti, Memoirs of My Life, trans. Edward Storer (London: Chapman and Dodd, 1923), pp. 296-352; B. Melli, La Guerra Italo-Turca: Cronistoria dei Principali Avvenimenti Politici e Tutto l'Anno 1913 (Rome: Enrico Vorghera, 1914); R. Gay de Montella, Diez años de Política Internacional en el Mediterráneo 1904-1914 (Barcelona: Casa provincial de Caridad Calle de Montalegre, n. d.).

⁴ Douglas Dakin, "The Diplomacy of the Great Powers and the Balkan States, 1908-1914," Balkan Studies 3 (1962): 344-53; Ernst Christian Helmreich, The Diplomacy of the Balkan Wars 1912-1913 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), pp. 69-80, 125-45. For an official view of Greece's participation in the Balkan Wars, see the Ypourgeion Stratiotikon, Genikon Epiteleion Stratou Polemike Ekthesis, O Ellenikos Stratos kata tous Balkanikous Polemous tou 1912-1913, 2 vols. (Athens, n.p., 1932).

subordinated to mainland concerns.

The operations of the Greek fleet in the first Balkan War centered on the strategic island of Lemnos. After its seizure on October 26, 1912, the area provided an excellent base for Hellenic naval ventures against the Ottoman Empire. Subsequently, the Greek fleet moved against other islands of the northern Aegean, taking Stratı, Samothrace, and Thasos on November 5.⁵

The initial naval operations of the First Balkan War were confined to the northern Aegean, near the Macedonian theater of conflict. Only in the latter part of November 1912, as the military effort of the Balkan allies began to bog down, did the government of Prime Minister Eleutherios Venizelos turn again toward the Aegean. On November 17, the Greeks took Icaria. Days later, four Hellenic warships captured Mytilene and Chios. Not until the spring of 1913 did Athens' navy occupy Samos.⁶ The fate of the Aegean islands was given a low priority by both Greece and Turkey during the initial weeks of the First Balkan War. The Turkish garrison on Chios numbered only four thousand, on Samothrace a mere six.⁷ As the two parties moved from the battlefield to the conference table, however, their positions regarding the islands underwent considerable change.

During December 1912, two London gatherings considered the results of the Balkan War. One meeting, at the St. James Palace, included the states of southeastern Europe and the Ottoman Empire. The other, held at the British Foreign Ministry, comprised the ambassadors of the six European great powers.

Discussions of the Aegean issue at these meetings focused on the Eastern Sporades. Rome continued to occupy the Southern Sporades until remaining Ottoman troops could be evacuated from Tripoli, as provided by the treaty of Lausanne. In practice, however, Italy and the Turks would use this provision to block

⁵ D. J. Cassavetti, Hellas and the Balkan Wars (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1914), pp. 39-42; Istoria tou Nautikou Polemou, 1912-13 (Athens: Scrip, n.d.), pp. 37-160.

⁶ Cassavetti, Hellas and the Balkan Wars, pp. 43-46; Istoria tou Nautikou Polemou, pp. 91-115; Ypourgeion Stratiotikon, O Ellenikos Stratos, I, pp. 319-334.

⁷ Cassavetti, Hellas and the Balkan Wars, pp. 42-44.

Greek attempts to gain the Dodecanese.

The St. James Conference began its deliberations on December 16, 1912. Six days later, at one of the first working sessions of the gathering, Greek and Turkish delegates clashed over the fate of the Aegean islands. Basing his claims on ethnic grounds, Greek Prime Minister Eleutherios Venizelos demanded that the Porte give up the islands, as well as Crete and most of Thrace. One of the Turkish representatives at the meeting, Minister of Commerce and Agriculture Reschid Pasha, objecting to the cession of any Aegean territories, replied that the Eastern Sporades were "an integral part of Anatolia" and therefore could not be surrendered.⁸

Actually, the Greeks also could have advanced strategic arguments, since possession of the Eastern Sporades would be necessary to protect the rest of their Aegean holdings. By the same token, the Turks could have contended that four hundred years of occupation had given them an ethnic claim to the islands. Yet such arguments do not seem to have been advanced.

At the subsequent sessions of the St. James Conference, Reschid Pasha stated that the presence of foreign troops on the islands so close to Anatolia was intolerable. Venizelos quickly noted that so long as the Ottoman Empire retained land borders with other states, those countries would be closer to Turkey than the Hellenic-occupied islands. Reschid then broke off the discussion, grumbling that his government had come to London to discuss territorial rectifications, not cessions.⁹ On January 6, 1913, the Ottoman diplomat vainly suggested that Athens restore the Eastern Sporades and receive, in return, full sovereignty over Crete.¹⁰

⁸ Protocole No. 2, Séance du 4 (17) décembre 1912, G. P. Gooch and Harold Temperley (eds.), British Documents on the Origins of the War 1898-1914, 11 vols. (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1926-1928) (cited hereafter as BD), 9(2): 1029-30.

⁹ Protocole No. 8, Séance du 19 décembre 1912(1 janvier 1913), BD, 9(2): 1044-45.

¹⁰ Protocole No. 10, Séance du 24 décembre 1913(6 janvier 1913), BD, 9(2): 1045-46.

As the St. James Conference developed, the ambassadors of the major European states discussed the Aegean issue at their ambassadors' conference. Even before the two meetings had convened, German Foreign Minister Alfred von Kiderlen-Waechter had proposed to Britain and France that the powers reserve for their own decision such issues as the Aegean islands and Albania. British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey voiced similar sentiments.¹¹

The ambassadors of the great powers held their first formal session on December 17, 1912. The next day, Russia's Count Alexander Benckendorff, first broached the topic of the Aegean islands. He proposed that the Porte cede Chios, Mytilene, and Psara to Greece and that Athens return Lemnos, Imbros, Tenedos, and Samothrace to the Turks. St. Petersburg's program met opposition from France. Paris favored the establishment of Greek sovereignty over all of the Eastern Sporades.¹² Following the December 18 gathering, Greek Prime Minister Eleutherios Venizelos met with Russian diplomats, offering to return Imbros and Tenedos in exchange for title to the rest of the Eastern Sporades.¹³ Venizelos' approaches to Russia quickly produced results. At the January 2, 1913, meeting of the ambassadors, Count Benckendorff asked that Imbros, Tenedos, and Lemnos be neutralized, but also requested that all of the Eastern Sporades be awarded to Athens.¹⁴

On January 7, 1913, the ambassadors again met. The previous day, the Balkan allies had suspended their discussion with the Turks. Only the collective urgings of the powers had prevented the allies from renewing military operations. Yet these conditions did not promote agreement among the ambassadors. On

¹¹ Grey to Goschen, London to Berlin, 21 November 1912, tel., BD 9(2): 192; Grey to Goschen, London to Berlin, 28 November 1912, tel., 9(2): 222.

¹² Grey to Cartwright, 18 December 1912, secr., BD 9(2): 295-96.

¹³ P. Cambon to Poincaré, London to Paris, 2 January 1913, very secr., Documents Diplomatiques Français (1871-1914) Third Series (1911-1914) (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1930-38) (hereafter cited as DDF), 5: 224.

¹⁴ Grey to Cartwright, London to Vienna, 2 January 1913, secr., BD 9(2): 334-36.

January 7, the Italian Ambassador Guglielmo Imperiali asked that the powers force Greece to return the Eastern Sporades.¹⁵ A week later, Athens' ambassador in Berlin, George Theotokos, learned that the German government was leaning toward the Turks and would expect Greece to make concessions in the Aegean.¹⁶ The Hellenic representative in Vienna, John Gryparis, subsequently discovered that Austria-Hungary would also oppose Greece. Foreign Minister Leopold von Berchtold told Gryparis that the Dual Monarchy feared that any deterioration of the Turkish Empire might endanger Vienna's investments there.¹⁷

The emergence of the Italian, German, and Austro-Hungarian positions completed the initial alignment of the great powers on the Aegean issue. The states of the Triple Entente leaned toward Greece, while the Triple Alliance backed the Turks. Although the London meetings of December 1912 and January 1913 produced no solution to the problem, they did bring the Aegean question before the great powers, opening the way for future diplomatic efforts.

As the powers failed to resolve the various problems of southeastern Europe during January 1913, the Balkan leaders tired of waiting for a diplomatic settlement. Denouncing the December 1912 armistice, they resumed the conflict during the

¹⁵ Grey to Cartwright, London to Vienna, 7 January 1913, BD 9(2): 372-73.

¹⁶ Theotokos to Ministère Affaires Étrangères Hellenique (cited as MAEH), Berlin 1/14 January 1913, Archives of the Greek Foreign Ministry (cited as AGFM), A/5, no. 260; Theotokos to MAEH, Berlin 2/15 January 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 821. (Because Greece still used the Julian calendar while much of Europe employed the Gregorian during this period, the Hellenic documents bore the Julian date, followed by the Gregorian.)

¹⁷ Gryparis to MAEH, Vienna 3/16 January 1913, AGFM, A/5, nos. 516, 437.

last days of January 1913.¹⁸

The interest in the Aegean issue taken by the great powers during the London conferences encouraged Greece and Turkey to avoid direct exchanges and seek outside support for their policies. Early in April, Ambassador Paul Cambon assured the Hellenic minister in London, John Gennadios, that Paris would continue to support Greece. Foreign Minister Stephan Pichon made similar pledges to Athens' Ambassador Athos Romanos.¹⁹ While Paris became an avowed supporter of Greece, Britain emerged as a silent partner to the Hellenes. Sir Edward Grey emphasized ending hostilities in the Balkans, yet privately assured Athens of support in the Aegean.²⁰

While Greece maintained the support of France and Britain, the Turks continued to receive the backing of Italy, Germany, and Austria-Hungary. Rome openly asserted that the Eastern Sporades should be restored and became especially angry with what Foreign Minister Antonio di San Giuliano described as "meddlesome" Hellenic efforts to obtain the Dodecanese.²¹ During May 1913, however, Rome's position softened as the Italians hinted to Athens that a diplomatic deal, involving

¹⁸ Djemal Pasha, Memories of a Turkish Statesman 1913-1919 (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1922), pp. 15-18; Goschen to Grey, 31 January 1913, BD 9(2): 464-66. Greece had signed the December armistice. Sporadic fighting continued in the Aegean during the period of the London conferences. Greek forces finally defeated the Turkish garrison on Mytilene in December 1912 and the one on Chios in January 1913. On the night of December 15-16, a Turkish battle squadron was defeated after challenging Greek vessels at the mouth of the Dardanelles. The incident effectively destroyed Ottoman seapower in the Aegean for months to come. Istoria tou Nautikou Polemou, pp. 234-322; Cas-savetti, Hellas and the Balkan Wars, pp. 44-58.

¹⁹ Gennadios to MAEH, London, 5/18 April 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 10903; Romanos to MAEH, Paris, 2/15 April 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 10577.

²⁰ Gennadios to MAEH, London, 5/18 April 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 4375; Gennadios to MAEH, London 16/29 May 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 15717.

²¹ Caclamanos to MAEH, Rome, 10/23 1913. AGFM, A/5, no. 7758; Alessandro Bosdari, Delle Guerre Balcaniche, della granda guerra e di alcuni fatti precedenti ad esse (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1928), pp. 75-77.

a Greek acquisition of the Eastern Sporades and Hellenic concessions in Albania, might be arranged.²² Berlin actually exceeded Rome in its backing for the Turkish cause. During March and April 1913, Secretary of State Alfred von Zimmermann informed Ambassador George Theotokos that Lemnos, Imbros, Tenedos, and Samothrace would have to be demilitarized if they were to remain in Greek hands. He added that Chios and Mytilene should be restored to the Porte, since Athens' possession of those islands might trigger disruptions among the Hellenes of nearby Asia Minor.²³ Berlin's influential diplomat in Constantinople, Hans von Wangenheim, fueled his government's worries by warning of uprisings by Anatolian Hellenes.²⁴ The Turks also enjoyed diplomatic success with Austria-Hungary, whose Foreign Minister maintained interest in Anatolian investments.²⁵

Amid these developments, Russia sustained an ambiguous position. In January 1913 the Tsar's government had backed Athens. Yet St. Petersburg opposed the establishment of any foreign navy at the mouth of the Dardanelles. Russia continued to focus its Balkan interests on Bulgaria, Rumania, and Serbia. This pattern became especially evident during the spring of 1913. As the First Balkan War raged, Rumania demanded the fortress of Silistria as compensation for its support of the Balkan allies. Russia's answer was a proposal that Bulgaria

²² Grey to Rodd, London to Rome, 19 May 1913 BD 9(2): 799-800; Caculamanos to MAEH, Rome, 13/26 May 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 15319.

²³ Theotokos to MAEH, Berlin, 1/14 February 1913, AGFM, A/5, 4755; Theotokos to MAEH, Berlin, 9/22 April 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 11698.

²⁴ Wangenheim to Jagow, Istanbul to Berlin, 13 March 1913, German Foreign Ministry Archives 1867-1920 (cited as GFMA), Tuerkel 203, Nr. 6, "Die Botschafterbesprechungen in London und die Friedensverhandlungen," University of California Microfilm, Series I, Reel 445 (cited as UCI/445), 18, no. A-5406.

²⁵ Conversation between Berchtold and Tschirschky, 17 May 1913, Oesterreich- Ungarns Aussenpolitik vonder Bosnischen Krise 1908 bis zum Kriegeausbruch 1914, 9 vols. (Vienna and Leipzig: Oesterreichische Bundesverlag fuer Unterricht Wissenschaft und Kunst, 1930) (cited as O-U A) 6:443-44.

give up Silistria and receive the island of Samothrace.²⁶ The exchange never took place, yet Russia's position showed that it would readily trade a Greek occupied island for the support of Athens' northern neighbors.

As the remaining Ottoman strongholds in Europe fell to the Balkan allies, Sir Edward Grey invited the belligerents to a renewed conference in London. The powers arranged a cease fire and prepared a draft treaty for submission to the contending parties. The agreement provided that the powers should decide the fate of the Eastern Sporades and delineate the borders of the new Albanian state.²⁷

After some haggling over the borders of Macedonia, the Balkan states and Turkey signed the draft agreement on May 30, 1913. Known as the Treaty of London, the package closed the First Balkan War.²⁸ At the same time, it left the Aegean and Albanian questions unsettled.

During June 1913, European diplomats continued to discuss the islands. Berlin hinted that Greece would have to demilitarize Imbros, Tenedos, Samothrace, and Lemnos before it could annex them. In a lengthy dispatch from Constantinople, dated June 12, Ambassador Hans von Wangenheim proposed that his government offer a comprehensive program for the resolution of the Aegean question. He suggested that Athens return Imbros, Tenedos, Lemnos, Samothrace, Chios, and Mytilene, adding that the Porte should also guarantee the rights of Hellenes living in those areas. He also proposed that Athens and the Porte

²⁶ Romanos to MAEH, Paris, 3/16 April 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 10577; Panas to MAEH, Istanbul, 5/18 April 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 11805; Romanos to MAEH, Paris, 15/28 April 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 12398.

²⁷ Grey to Elliot, London to Athens, 23 April 1913, tel., BD 9(2): 710; P. Cambon to Pichon, London to Paris, 20 May 1913, DDF 5: 654-57; P. Cambon to Pichon, London to Paris, 3 May 1913, DDF 5: 541.

²⁸ The text of the treaty is contained in Stamatiios Antonopoulos, Sunthekai Londinou, Boukourestiou, kai Athenon (Athens: N. Apostolopoulou, 1917), pp. 1-4.

cement their deal with a defensive alliance.²⁹ The Ambassador's program was not immediately adopted by Berlin. The plan did, however, affect German policy in succeeding months.

Italy also continued to dabble in Aegean diplomacy during the weeks after the signing of the Treaty of London. On June 3, 1913, Ambassador Imperiali hinted to Sir Edward Grey that his government might cede the Southern Sporades to Greece if certain, unnamed conditions were met.³⁰

The diplomat exchanges concerning the Aegean and the Balkans were interrupted by the renewal of fighting in the area on the night of June 29-30, 1913. This second Balkan War pitted Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Rumania, and the Ottoman Empire against Bulgaria. At stake were the spoils of the First Balkan War. Although the second conflict was also a land war, one important naval move occurred. On July 9, a Greek flotilla, having raced down the Macedonian coast, landed troops at Kavalla. The capture of the city and its environs helped Greece gain title to Thasos. That island, although Hellenic, had been marked by the powers for transfer to Bulgaria. Athens' action thus gave Greece a strategic, in addition to an ethnic case, for the possession of the island.³¹

The Treaty of Bucharest, which concluded the Second Balkan War, left the Aegean issue unresolved.³² The great power deliberations which accompanied the signing of the Bucharest agreement were more important than the treaty for the islands. On August 1, 1913, Sir Edward Grey convened the London Ambassadors to resolve the Aegean and Albanian disputes. Yet the powers deadlocked as they had earlier. After an August 5

²⁹ Psychas to MAEH, Istanbul, 26 May/8 June 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 16274; Theotokos to MAEH, Berlin, 28 May/10 June 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 16614; Wangenheim to Jagow, Istanbul to Berlin, 10 June 1913, GFMA, UCI/449, 38, no. A-11650.

³⁰ Dering to Grey, Rome to London, 19 June 1913, BD 9(2): 855-56; Canellopoulos to MAEH, Rome, 30 May/11 June, AGFM, A/5, no. 16737.

³¹ Cassavetti, Hellas and the Balkan Wars, pp. 330-31; Is'torika tou Nautikou Poleμου, pp. 102-03.

³² For the text of the treaty, see Antonopoulos, Hai Sunthekai, pp. 83-90.

session, Grey's move collapsed when the French attempted to pressure Italy out of the Southern Sporades.³³

Sir Edward Grey attempted to restrain France but to no avail. Rome reacted angrily to Paris' advances, claiming that the Dodecanese were an Italo-Turkish concern. Paris first rejected British entreaties then capitulated. On August 11, 1913, France agreed to leave the fate of the Southern Sporades to a unanimous decision of the great powers.³⁴ Early in September 1913, Foreign Minister Pichon again declared that Italy's occupation of the Dodecanese was being excessively prolonged. Still, Italian forces remained in the Southern Sporades throughout the autumn of 1913.³⁵

As the great powers failed to settle the Aegean dispute, Greece and Turkey moved closer to war. During the autumn of 1913, Athens learned that the Porte was attempting to purchase the Italian cruisers Sicily and Sardinia.³⁶ In September, Turkey and Bulgaria ended their state of war and attempted to conclude a military alliance.³⁷

³³ Grey to Cartwright, London to Vienna, 1 August 1913, BD 9 (2): 949-50; P. Cambon to Pichon, London to Paris, 1 August 1913, DDF 7: 558-60; Grey to Cartwright, London to Vienna, 5 August 1913, BD 9(2): 954-56; Romanos to MAEH, Paris, 24 July/6 August 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 21662.

³⁴ Grey to Bertie, London to Paris, 6 August 1913, tel., BD 9(2): 958-59; Billy to Pichon, Rome to Paris, 7 August 1913, DDF 7:604; Grey to Rodd, London to Rome, 8 August 1913, tel., BD 9(2): 970; Grey to Cartwright, London to Vienna, 11 August 1913. BD 9(2): Appendix V, pp. 1066-68.

³⁵ Bertie to Grey, Paris to London, 9 September 1913, tel. conf., BD 10:133-34; Grey to Bertie, London to Paris, 13 September 1913, BD 10: 134; Rodd to Grey, Rome to London, 8 September 1913. BD 10: 132; Giolitti, Memoirs of My Life, pp. 369-72.

³⁶ Canellopoulos to MAEH, Rome, 28 August/11 September 1913 AGFM, A/5, no. 24237.

³⁷ Levidis to MAEH, Istanbul, 1/14 September 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 24774; Theotokos to MAEH, Berlin, 13/26 September 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 26003; Tarnowski to Berchtold, Sofia to Vienna, 27 September 1913, tel. conf., O-U A 7:372; Djemal Pasha, Memories of a Turkish Statesman, pp. 52-55.

In these threatening circumstances, the emerging German presence added further pressure for a negotiated settlement. In September, Berlin began to promote direct negotiations between Athens and the Porte. Ambassador Hans von Wangenheim, who had originated the idea during the previous June, suggested another compromise solution. He proposed that Greece sanction Turkish suzerainty over the Eastern Sporades in return for Athens' right to garrison and administer the archipelago.³⁸

Berlin soon discovered that talking about an Aegean solution was far easier than arranging one. The Venizelos government, in control of the territories in question, proved reluctant to endanger its position through negotiation.³⁹ During September 1913, Turkey, then discussing a defensive alliance with Bulgaria, also hesitated. Berlin's own ally Austria-Hungary, secretly encouraged the Turks and Bulgars.⁴⁰

Utilizing other diplomatic channels, Italy worked with the Porte. In October 1913, Greek envoy Spiros Levidis learned of a secret understanding between the Italians and Turks. By terms of the agreement, Rome would acquire permanent title to Rhodes and Astypalia and return the remainder of the Southern Sporades to the Ottoman Empire.⁴¹

Early in the autumn of 1913 the Aegean situation worsened. Turkey began a military buildup on its coast opposite Chios and Mytilene. King Constantine of Greece appealed to the British and French for help.⁴² London and Paris joined with Berlin to pressure the contending parties into beginning direct talks.

³⁸ Levidis to MAEH, Istanbul, 1/14 September 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 24773; Levidis to MAEH, Istanbul, 1/14 September 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 24774.

³⁹ Wangenheim to Jagow, Istanbul to Berlin, 1 October 1913, GFMA, UCI/450, 53, no. A-19798; Wangenheim to Jagow, Istanbul to Berlin, 27 September 1913, GFMA, UCI/430, 53.

⁴⁰ Theotokos to MAEH, Berlin, 17/30 September 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 26431; Tarnowski to Berchtold, Sofia to Vienna, 10 October 1913, tel. conf., 8:431.

⁴¹ Levidis to MAEH, Istanbul, 2/15 October 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 28213.

⁴² Pichon to P. Cambon, Paris to London, 2 October 1913, DDF 8:309; Sicilianos to MAEH, Rome, 20 September/3 October 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 26693; P. Cambon to Pichon, London to Paris, 2 October 1913, very conf., DDF 8:310-11; Theotokos to MAEH, Berlin, 13 September/1 October 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 26517.

Bilateral discussions began in Athens early in October 1913. Almost immediately, the two parties reached a deadlock on the Aegean issue. Talaat Pasha, the Ottoman Minister of the Interior, declared on October 5 that Athens must return the Eastern Sporades, threatening war if this were not done. Greece refused to meet the Turkish demands.⁴³

Subsequently, the European powers unsuccessfully attempted to break the stalemate. Paris suggested that, after Italy evacuated the Dodecanese, the Porte should exchange Rhodes and Astypalia for title to Chios and Mytilene.⁴⁴ Ambassador Imperiali hinted that Rome might evacuate the Southern Sporades if it could obtain an economic concession in Asia Minor.⁴⁵ On October 28, 1913, the Porte complained that the Venizelos government was not negotiating in good faith.⁴⁶ At the same time, the Germans became pessimistic about prospects for a solution.⁴⁷

In November 1913 the two parties finally began to make progress. The change was produced by Rumanian Foreign Minister Take Ionescu. A friend and admirer of Eleutherios Venizelos, Ionescu attempted a one-sided mediation of the outstanding difficulties. He warned the Porte that it was playing a "dangerous game" with Sofia. He declared that Rumania would strike at any state which altered the provisions of the Treaty of Bucharest, coercing Talaat into promising to conclude a treaty with Greece within the immediate future.⁴⁸

⁴³ Levidis to MAEH, Istanbul, 22 September/5 October 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 26954; Levidis to MAEH, Istanbul, 27 September/10 October 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 27388.

⁴⁴ Streit to MAEH, Vienna, 4/17 October 1913, conf. AGFM, A/5, no. 28145; Manneville to Pichon, Rome to Paris, 24 October 1913, DDF 8:482-84.

⁴⁵ Dering to Grey, Rome to London, 15 October 1913, tel., BD 10:136-37; Grey to Dering, London to Rome, 4 November 1913, BD 10:141-42.

⁴⁶ Levidis to MAEH, Istanbul, 15/28 October 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 29041.

⁴⁷ Theotokos to MAEH, Berlin, 17/30 October 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 30644; Theotokos to MAEH, Berlin, 21 October/2 November 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 29591.

⁴⁸ Take Ionescu, Some Personal Impressions (New York: Stokes, 1920), pp. 175-76; Lowenthal to Berchtold, Bucharest to Vienna, 9 November 1913, O-U A 8: 545-56.

The promised agreement was signed in the Hellenic capital as the Treaty of Athens on November 14, 1913. It removed the state of war still existing between Greece and Turkey; restored diplomatic relations between the two states; and guaranteed the civil and religious rights of Muslims living in Macedonia and Epirus. It did not treat the island question.⁴⁹

Take Ionescu considered his diplomatic mission a success.⁵⁰ In retrospect, however, the Treaty of Athens has come to rank with the treaties of London and Bucharest. All these agreements treated affairs in the Balkans but conveniently avoided the question of the Aegean islands.

In the months immediately following the conclusion of the Treaty of Athens, Great Britain and Greece mounted a wide-ranging diplomatic effort to settle the island problem. Prime Minister Venizelos originated the move during December 1913. In conversation with British diplomats, he revived the concept of a joint solution for the Aegean and Albanian disputes, offering to pull back his nation's troops in the northern Epirus-southern Albanian area in return for title to all of the Eastern Sporades except Imbros and Tenedos. Venizelos also suggested that the Dodecanese be returned to the Porte and placed under "a large measure of autonomy."⁵¹

The Greek Prime Minister hoped that London would use its position to win approval for the effort. Sir Edward Grey favored the plan, although he eventually grouped the tiny island of Castellorizo with Imbros and Tenedos as territories destined for restoration to the Porte. The Foreign Secretary easily found support for the Venizelos proposal within the Triple Entente. France quickly backed the new effort. Russia at first hesitated, claiming that Lemnos and Samothrace ought

⁴⁹ Fuerstenberg to Berchtold, Istanbul to Vienna, 11 November 1913, tel. secr., O-U A 8:548-49; Fuerstenberg to Berchtold, Istanbul to Vienna, 11 November 1913, tel. secr., O-U A 8:549-50.

⁵⁰ Ionescu, Some Personal Impressions, p. 245.

⁵¹ Elliot to Grey, Athens to London, 10 December 1913, tel., BD 10:73-74; Note de l'ambassade de Grande Bretagne, 13 December 1913, DDF 8:778.

to be restored to the Porte, then agreed with its allies.⁵²

The British and the Greeks had a more difficult time finding support for their program among the Triple Alliance. Negotiations with the Germans became entangled in the Liman von Sanders affair. France and Russia had raised a diplomatic furor over the presence of Berlin's military officers, led by Marshal Liman, in the Turkish army during November 1913. The Tsar's government urged that an ultimatum be delivered to the Porte, demanding the withdrawal of the German military mission.⁵³ Sir Edward Grey enjoined his allies to use moderation. Early in January 1914, Greek officials obtained word that Berlin would support the Grey program.⁵⁴

Securing the adherence of Italy brought fresh difficulties. Hellenic diplomats learned that Rome had objections to the plan and might pursue separate settlements for the Aegean and Albania.⁵⁵ In January 1914, Italy hinted to London that it might compromise in the Aegean in return for economic advantages in Anatolia. After Sir Edward Grey granted Rome permission to negotiate with the British Smyrna-Aidin Railway Company, Foreign Minister San Giuliano told the Greeks that his government would

⁵² Doumergue to P. Cambon, Dumaine, J. Cambon, Billy, Delcasse, Bompard, and Poulpique, Paris, 23 December 1913, tel., DDF 8:833; Dragoumis to MAEH, St. Petersburg, 13/26 December 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 34484; Buchanan to Grey, St. Petersburg to London, 10 February 1913, tel., BD 10:226.

⁵³ "Constantinople and the Straits," Krasnyi arkhiv, 1924, no. 11 (7), pp. 38-40; The Russian Ambassador at Berlin to Sazonov, 8/21 November 1913, conf., Benno von de Siebert, Entente Diplomacy and the World, Matrix of the History of Europe (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1921), pp. 676-78; Sazonov to the Russian Chargé d'Affaires at London, 12/25 November 1913, tel., de Siebert, Entente Diplomacy, p. 678.

⁵⁴ Caclamanos to MAEH, Rome, 22 December/4 January 1914, tel. str. conf., AGFM, A/5, no. 34120.

⁵⁵ Theotokos to MAEH, Berlin, 4/17 December 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 33764; Dragoumis to MAEH, St. Petersburg, 5/18 December 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 33893.

support Athens' claim to Lemnos and Samothrace, as well as the rest of the Eastern Sporades.⁵⁶

With Italy and Germany, Austria-Hungary moved into line behind the Venizelos-Grey effort.⁵⁷ Austria-Hungary's action may have been part of a reorientation of her Balkan policy. Apparently tired of waiting for a Turco-Bulgarian alliance, Foreign Minister Leopold von Berchtold even suggested an Austro-Greek pact to Eleutherios Venizelos in January 1914.⁵⁸

With the great powers consenting to the substance of the proposed agreement, details of a declaration on the Aegean and Albania were hammered out during February 1914. The final text provided for the restoration of Imbros, Tenedos, and Castellorizo to the Porte, and the Hellenic annexation of the rest of the Eastern Sporades. The agreement also contained the specifications for Athens' pullback from the northern Epirus-southern Albania area. The great powers devised two separate declarations embodying the peace plan. One was delivered in Athens on February 13, 1914. The other was presented in Constantinople the next day.⁵⁹ Shortly afterward, the Porte responded, refusing to cede Chios, Mytilene, Psara, Lemnos, and Samothrace, and claiming that those islands were necessary for the defense of Asia Minor. At the same time, Turkey accepted the agreement's provisions for the restoration of Imbros, Tenedos, and Castellorizo.⁶⁰ Athens replied on February 15, accepting the proposal

⁵⁶ Rodd to Grey, 27 December 1913, Rome to London, tel., BD 10:167; Grey to Bertie, London to Paris, 6 January 1914, BD 10:180-81; Grey to Rodd, London to Rome, 7 January 1914, BD 10:182-83; Rodd to Grey, Rome to London, 9 January 1913, tel., BD 10: 184-85.

⁵⁷ Streit to MAEH, Vienna, 10/23 December 1913, AGFM, A/5, no. 34288; Gennadios to MAEH, London, 14/27 January 1914, AGFM, A/5, no. 970.

⁵⁸ Memorandum of January 30, 1914 Interview between Minister Count Berchtold and Minister President Venizelos, 30 January 1914, O-U A 7:806-11.

⁵⁹ Grey to Rodd, London to Rome, 28 January 1914, conf., BD 10:203-04; Rodd to Grey, Rome to London, 3 February 1914, conf., BD 10:230; Collective Note addressed to M. Streit, 13 February (31 January) 1914, BD 10:231-32; Collective Note to Sublime Porte, 14 February 1914, BD 10:233.

⁶⁰ Reply of Sublime Porte to Collective Note, 14 February 1914, BD 10:233-34.

yet demanding protection for Hellenes living in northern Epirus.⁶¹

The February 1914 declaration marked a high point of great power cooperation on the Aegean issue. Yet the future of the plan would largely depend on the powers' willingness to enforce it.

During the first months of 1914, it became especially important to Greece that the declaration be implemented. In the autumn of 1913, Athens had lost to the Turks an international bidding competition for possession of the Brazilian dreadnought Rio de Janeiro. The ship, due for completion in mid-1914 lay under construction in the Armstrong and Vickers naval yard. The Venizelos government had originally proposed that Britain or France make the purchase. Neither power was sufficiently interested, although Paris offered to advance Athens the purchase price. As the French and Hellenes dawdled, the Turks obtained rights to the dreadnought.⁶² The Porte's acquisition of the vessel promised to multiply the strength of the Ottoman fleet.⁶³

Word of the Porte's purchase of the Rio de Janeiro, renamed the Sultan Osman, caused consternation in Hellenic diplomatic circles. Athens vainly attempted to purchase the Chilean dreadnought Almirante Latorre as well as the Argentine Moreno and Rivadavia. Greece did order a new dreadnought, the Salamis, from the French during the first weeks of 1914. Yet the vessel

⁶¹ La Réponse de La Grèce aux Puissances, 9/22 February 1914, BD 10:235-37.

⁶² Romanos to MAEH, Paris, 12/25 November 1913, tel. urgent, str. conf. AGFM B/48, no. 31602; Romanos to MAEH, Paris, 29 November/11 December 1913, AGFM, B/48, no. 33220; Levidis to MAEH, Istanbul, 16/29 December 1913, tel., AGFM, B/48, no. 34976.

⁶³ Another dreadnought, the Reschadieh, had long been under construction by Armstrong and Vickers but was not due for delivery until the autumn of 1914. Paul G. Halpern, The Mediterranean Naval Situation 1908-1914 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 322-23, 341-42, 378; Ioannon Metaxa, To Prosopiko tou Imerologio (4 vols.) (Athens: n. p., 1951-64), 2:231.

would not be ready until the close of that year.⁶⁴

Athens continued to search for available naval vessels as Prime Minister Venizelos attempted to conclude a political settlement to the island dispute. Ironically, the Hellenic leader's efforts failed because of the actions of the Greeks. On February 28, 1914, the Hellenes of northern Epirus, fearing assimilation into the Albanian state, declared their independence under former Greek Foreign Minister George Zographos. The program of the rebels, autonomy for northern Epirus within Albania, was a moderate one.⁶⁵ Despite Venizelos' efforts to dissociate Athens from the Zographos revolt Italy, on March 19, requested that Athens provide guarantees against similar occurrences in the Aegean.⁶⁶ During April and May, Rome resumed its previous dealings with the Turks concerning the Aegean, again insisting that the Dodecanese were an Italo-Turkish concern.⁶⁷

Italy's defection from the February 1914 agreement concerning the islands hurt chances for the proposal's implementation. As Rome's position shifted, Greek Prime Minister Venizelos suggested that the Triple Entente join Athens in guaranteeing the status quo of the Mediterranean. He emphasized that Britain, in particular, might require the use of Greek harbors should a European war break out.⁶⁸ France and Russia generally favored the Hellenic plan, yet Sir Edward Grey proved reluctant to make additional diplomatic commitments.⁶⁹ Venizelos' appeal demon-

⁶⁴ Levidis to MAEH, Istanbul, 24 December/6 January 1914, AGFM, B/48, no. 35850.

⁶⁵ Lascaris, Diplomatike Istoria, pp. 241-43; Lamb to Grey, 28 February 1914, BD 10:103-04; Leon Maccas, La Question Greco-Albanaise (Paris: Berger Levrault, 1921), pp. 136-38.

⁶⁶ Coromilas to MAEH, Rome, 21 February/6 March 1914, AGFM, A/5, no. 6425; Dragoumis to MAEH, St. Petersburg, 7/20 March 1914, AGFM, A/5, no. 6444.

⁶⁷ Dragoumis to MAEH, St. Petersburg, 27 April/10 May 1914, AGFM, A/5, no. 12139; Panas to MAEH, Istanbul, 1/14 May 1914, AGFM, A/5, no. 12697.

⁶⁸ Elliot to Grey, Athens to London, 10 March 1914, priv. conf., BD 10:239-40.

⁶⁹ Ibid., Grey to Bertie, London to Paris, 13 March 1914, BD 10:241-42.

strated that his hopes for a diplomatic settlement to the Aegean question rested on the great powers. At the same time, it revealed the increasingly critical nature of Athens' Aegean position.

The Entente's failure to back the Greek plan further narrowed the range of possibilities for a settlement of the Aegean issue. During April and May 1914 German Emperor Wilhelm I and Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg visited Corfu and attempted to mediate the dispute. Their plan called for the restoration of Ottoman suzerainty over Chios and Mytilene and the establishment of a Greek administration over the islands. Athens approved the program, yet Talaat Pasha told Bethmann-Hollweg that the Porte saw little reason to compromise since the two dreadnoughts would guarantee a Turkish recapture of the islands.⁷⁰ Rumania also unsuccessfully attempted to mediate the dispute during the spring of 1914.⁷¹

By June, opportunities for a peaceful resolution of the issue were fast being exhausted. In this situation, the Greek Government once more opted for negotiation. During the previous February, the Porte had hinted that it might exchange Chios and Mytilene for the Dodecanese.⁷² The Venizelos govern-

⁷⁰ Bethmann-Hollweg to Jagow, Achilleon to Berlin, 18 April 1914, GFMA, UCI/450, 63, no. A-7531; Bethmann-Hollweg to Jagow, Achilleon to Berlin, 17 April 1914, GFMA, UCI/450 63, no. A-7533; Bethmann-Hollweg to Jagow, Achilleon, 22 April 1914, Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914, Sammlung der diplomatischen Akten des Auswaertigen Amtes, Johannes Lepsius, Albrecht Mendelssohn Bartholdy and Friedrich Thimme, Eds., 40 vols., Berlin, 1927 (cited as GP), 36:569, no. 14369; Bethmann-Hollweg to Jagow, Achilleon to Berlin, 20 April 1914, GP, 36:568, no. 14368.

⁷¹ Take Ionescu had left office during the initial months of the year, however, and Bucharest now pursued a less forceful Aegean policy. Ionescu, Some Personal Impressions, pp. 176-77; Barclay to Grey, Bucharest to London, 4 March 1914, conf. BD 10:238; Elliot to Grey (fn), Athens to London, 3 April 1914, conf., BD 10: 244-45.

⁷² Panas to MAEH, Istanbul, 11/24 February 1914, AGFM, A/5, no. 3930; Panas to MAEH, Istanbul, 13/26 February 1914, AGFM, A/5, no. 4152.

ment approached the Porte, yet found the Turks confidently awaiting the completion of their vessels. At the same time, the Ottoman Empire renewed attacks on Hellenes who resided in Anatolia and Thrace.⁷³

The Porte's actions were symptomatic of Turkey's confidence. Other events also gave the Porte ground for optimism. In May 1914, Talaat Pasha and other Ottoman Diplomats journeyed to St. Petersburg to propose an alliance with Russia. Although an agreement was not immediately concluded, a rapprochement between the two states evolved.⁷⁴ In April 1914, the Third Republic floated a large Turkish loan on the Paris Bourse. Shortly afterward, a French naval consortium accepted orders for six Turkish destroyers. Minister of the Marine Djemal Pasha attended a review of Paris' fleet.⁷⁵

By June, Prime Minister Venizelos became so desperate that he began to threaten the Turks. He explained to British diplomats that Athens had to strike the Ottoman fleet while the opportunity existed. Foreign Minister George Streit, emphasizing the plight of Greeks within the Ottoman Empire, declared that things "had reached a point at which to yield was impossible. It would mean the end of Hellenism."⁷⁶ The Venizelos

⁷³ Dumaine to Doumergue, Vienna to Paris, 26 March 1914, DDF 10:39-41; Panas to MAEH, Istanbul, 1-14 May 1914, AGFM, A/5, no. 12697; Metaxa, To Prosopiko tou Imerologio, 2:231; Colomies to Doumergue, Smyrna to Paris, 17 April 1914, tel., DDF 10:185; Romanos to Doumergue (with annex), Paris, 17 April 1914, DDF 10:185; Mallet to Grey, Istanbul to London, 21 May 1914, BD 10:252-53.

⁷⁴ Pallavicini to Berchtold, St. Petersburg to Vienna, 4 April 1914, very conf., O-U A 7:1028-31; Pallavicini to Berchtold, St. Petersburg to Vienna, 13 May 1914, O-U A 8:32-34.

⁷⁵ Djemal Pasha, Memories of a Turkish Statesman, pp. 104-07; Halpern, The Mediterranean Naval Situation, pp. 349-50; Jacob Viner, "International Finance and Balance of Power Diplomacy," Southwestern Political and Social Science Quarterly 9 (March 1929): 428-36.

⁷⁶ Elliot to Grey, Athens to London, 28 May 1914, BD 10:253-54; Erskine to Grey, Athens to London, 16 June 1914, conf., BD 10:264.

government considered annexing all of the Eastern Sporades, except Imbros and Tenedos, by royal decree.⁷⁷ Athens also purchased the aging United States battleships Idaho and Mississippi. Greece acquired title to the vessels late in May and planned to have them in the Aegean by June.⁷⁸

Europe buzzed with talk of a conflict over the islands. France moved warships to positions off the Anatolian coast. Rumanian Prime Minister Ionel Bratianu expressed concern that Athens might strike the Turkish fleet at any time.⁷⁹ Djemal Pasha boasted that the Ottoman navy could defeat Greece, even before the dreadnoughts arrived.⁸⁰ On June 28, 1914, Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated by a Serbian terrorist. Yet Europe's attention continued to be held by the confrontation in the Aegean.

Nonetheless a Greco-Turkish conflict was averted. On June 29 the Grand Vizir assured that his government wished for peaceful relation; he hinted of the possibility of a deal involving Chios and Mytilene, and invited further diplomatic exchanges on the subject. At the same time, Talaat Pasha indicated that the deportation of numerous Hellenes from the coasts opposite Chios and Mytilene had lessened the possibility for war. On June 30, the Turks proposed that the eastern Sporades be established as an autonomous province with the sons of Greek King Constantine serving as governors.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Erskine to Grey, Athens to London, 24 June 1914, tel. conf., BD 10:265-66; Henry Morgenthau, Ambassador Morgenthau's Story (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1918), pp. 52-58; The Russian Ambassador at London to Sazonov (fn.), 30 May/12 June 1914, de Siebert, Entente Diplomacy, p. 730.

⁷⁸ Morgenthau, Ambassador Morgenthau's Story, pp. 52-58; Romanos to MAEH, 18 June/1 July, 1914, AGFM, A/5, no. 19471.

⁷⁹ Barclay to Grey, Bucharest to London, 30 May 1914, tel. conf., BD 10: 255-56.

⁸⁰ Mallet to Grey, St. Petersburg to London, 2 June 1914, BD 10:256-57.

⁸¹ Panas to MAEH, Istanbul, 16/29 June 1914, AGFM, A/5, no. 19008; Panas to MAEH, Istanbul, 16/29 June 1914, very conf., AGFM, A/5, unnumbered; Panas to MAEH, Istanbul, 17/30 June 1914, tel. very conf., AGFM, A/5, unnumbered.

The causes of the sudden change in the Aegean situation were varied. Attention has been drawn to the refusal of Rumania and Serbia to back Athens in a new Balkan conflict.⁸² Greece's purchase of the two United States battleships may have influenced the Porte to mitigate its demands. Nevertheless, it seems probable that Venizelos' threatened attack on the Turkish fleet, in temporarily removing the danger of war, became a great diplomatic success.

As the possibility of a Greco-Turkish war lingered, the two states approached the conference table. British journalist E. J. Dillon mediated the new exchanges. On July 2, 1914 he met Talaat Pasha in Constantinople. The Ottoman official seemed conciliatory, indicating that the eventual settlement must include a face-saving formula for Turkey.⁸³ Six days later, in Athens, Dillon and Eleutherios Venizelos worked out the terms of a compromise. The formula provided that Hellenic troops would remain on Thasos, Lemnos, Samothrace, Chios, Mytilene, Samos, and Paros, and that political control of the islands would be vested in the sons of King Constantine. A bilateral conference in Brussels would hammer out the details of the agreement.⁸⁴ The Turkish cabinet quickly approved these terms on July 13, 1914, appointing the Grand Vizir as its delegate to the conference.⁸⁵

For a time it seemed that the status of at least the Eastern Sporades might be settled. On July 15, Talaat Pasha suggested that the governors of the islands be appointed jointly by the King of Greece and the Sultan, instead of merely by the King. When Venizelos replied that the Brussels meeting had been arranged to work out such details, the Turkish government

⁸² George Leon, Greece and the Great Powers 1914-1917 (Salonica: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1974), p. 14.

⁸³ Panas to MAEH, Istanbul, 19 June/2 July 1914, very conf., AGFM, no. 3783.

⁸⁴ Erskine to Grey, Athens to London, 8 July 1914, very conf., BD 10:268; Mallet to Grey, Istanbul to London, 12 July 1914, tel., BD 10:270; Mallet to Grey, Istanbul to London, 13 July 1914, tel. very conf., BD 10: 270-71.

⁸⁵ Mallet to Grey, Istanbul to London, 13 July 1914, very conf., BD 10:270-71.

responded with a renewed vote of confidence in the proposals.⁸⁶ On July 21, the Greek Prime Minister left Athens for Brussels. He planned to travel as far as Munich and wait until the Grand Vizir left Constantinople. As Venizelos travelled, however, the Vizir remained in the Turkish capital.⁸⁷

On July 28, 1914, other Balkan events intervened to block the planned Brussels conference. After the Serbs refused to fulfill all of Austria's demands concerning the murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Vienna declared war. The next day, Vienna's guns bombarded Belgrade. Venizelos noted that he still hoped to meet with the Turks regarding the Aegean issue, but declared that the journey to Brussels had to be abandoned. He left Munich for Athens on July 29.⁸⁸ The coming of World War I in Europe thus damaged whatever possibilities may have existed for an Aegean settlement. On August 3, Germany declared war on France and invaded Belgium. Berlin's subsequent occupation of Brussels eliminated that city as a meeting place for the planned talks.

The late turn of events seriously weakened the Hellenic position. The first of the Porte's dreadnoughts, the Sultan Osman, was scheduled to arrive in the eastern Mediterranean sometime in August 1914. During July, Djemal Pasha had dispatched an Ottoman crew to the Armstrong and Vickers naval yard, hoping to speed completion of the vessel. Greek diplomats

⁸⁶ Beaumont to Grey, Istanbul to London, 15 July 1914 tel. conf., BD 10:272; Beaumont to Grey, Istanbul to London, 16 July 1914, tel. conf., BD:274; Erskine to Grey, Athens to London, 17 July 1914, tel. conf., BD 10:274-75; Erskine to Grey, Athens to London, 18 July 1914, tel. conf., BD 10:375; Beaumont to Grey, Istanbul to London, 22 July 1914, tel., BD 10:376.

⁸⁷ Venizelos to Streit, Munich to Athens 12/25 July 1914, tel., AGFM, A/5, unnumbered; Streit to Venizelos, Athens to Munich, 12/25 July 1914, tel., AGFM, A/5, unnumbered.

⁸⁸ Panas to MAEH, Istanbul, 14/27 July 1914, tel., AGFM, A/5, unnumbered; Venizelos to MAEH, 14/27 July 1914, tel., AGFM, A/5, unnumbered; Venizelos to Streit, Munich to Athens, 15/28 July 1914, tel., AGFM, A/5, unnumbered; Venizelos to Streit, Munich to Athens, 16/29 July 1914, tel., AGFM, A/5, unnumbered.

subsequently learned that the last Ottoman payment for the Sultan Osman had been delivered. In desperation, the Venizelos government petitioned London to prevent release of the warship.⁸⁹ Early in August 1914, Britain acted. The coming of World War I had touched London as her allies, France and Russia, became involved, and the Germans violated the neutrality of Belgium. On August 2, the British appropriated both the Sultan Osman and the Reschadieh. Djemal Pasha received the news with "mental anguish"⁹⁰ The confiscation of the dreadnoughts removed a major threat to Greek possessions of the Eastern Sporades. Although the efficacy of the large warships in the Aegean had been debated, the fear which they generated had been a significant factor in Greek diplomacy during the first half of 1914.

The removal of the dreadnoughts did not immediately eliminate the threat to peace. On August 10, the German cruisers Goeben and Breslau arrived in Constantinople. Although Berlin assured the Greeks that the ships would be used only against Russia, the Venizelos government believed that the Turks would attempt to extract concessions on the island issue.⁹¹ Athens' fears were confirmed by a stiffening of the Turkish negotiating position. On August 12, Ghalib Bey, the Porte's ambassador to Greece, proposed that Athens restore Chios and Mytilene, offering only Lemnos and Samothrace in return.⁹²

The German cruisers and the Ottoman position created a mood of desperation within the Hellenic government. On August 19,

⁸⁹ Djemal Pasha, Memories of a Turkish Statesman, pp. 90-91; Panas to MAEH, Istanbul, 22 July/4 August 1914, tel., AGFM, A/5, no. 24670; Panas to MAEH, Istanbul, 4/17 August 1914, tel., AGFM, A/5, no. 26464.

⁹⁰ Gennadios to MAEH, London, 31 July/13 August 1914, tel., AGFM, A/5, no. 26069; Djemal Pasha, Memories of a Turkish Statesman, pp. 116-17.

⁹¹ Theotokos to MAEH, Berlin, 1/14 August 1914, AGFM, A/5, no. 25633; Streit to Panas, Athens to Istanbul, 3/16 August 1914, AGFM, A/5, no. 26186; Halpern, The Mediterranean Naval Situation, pp. 355-57.

⁹² Streit to Panas, Athens to Istanbul, 31 July/13 August 1914, AGFM, A/5, no. 25507; Panas to MAEH, Istanbul, 30 July/12 August 1914, AGFM, A/5, no. 4975.

Venizelos offered the Entente powers all the military and naval forces of Greece. At the same time, he argued that Athens' alliance with Serbia obligated the Entente to protect Greece from attack. St. Petersburg struggled to avoid the establishment of an Entente connection with Athens, fearing it would provoke a Turkish move against her Black Sea coast. Sir Edward Grey also declined Venizelos' offer, believing that the establishment of such a connection would immediately push Turkey and Bulgaria into the World War on the side of the Triple Alliance.⁹³

Stimulated by Rumanian suggestions that he negotiate with the Porte, Venizelos next arranged a meeting in Bucharest with Ottoman representatives. The gathering convened in an atmosphere of tension. On August 27, Talaat Pasha declared that his government would deliver an ultimatum to Greece unless Lemnos, Chios, Mytilene and Samos were immediately restored. Under pressure from the Triple Entente, Venizelos offered to recognize Turkish sovereignty over Chios, Mytilene, and Samos, in return for a fifty year lease of those islands. He also suggested other formulae which might involve the administration of the islands by an autonomous regime. Yet Athens would not abandon its occupation of the Eastern Sporades. The Bucharest Conference broke up without reaching a settlement. Turkey subsequently offered to make adjustment on the island issue if Athens would promise to remain neutral in the widening international struggle. Unwilling to compromise his connections with the Triple Entente, Venizelos

⁹³ Sir Edward Grey, Twenty-Five Years, 1892-1916 (2 vols.) (London: Hodder and Stoughton 1925) 2:174; Kommissiya pri Prezidiume TsTK Soyuza SSR po izdaniyu dokumentov epokhi imperializma, Mezhdunarodnie otosheniya v epokhu imperializma Dokumenty iz arkhivov Tsarskogo i Vremennogo Pravitelstv 1878-1917 gg. Series III, 1914-1917 (cited as MOVEI) Moscow-Leningrad, 1938-40, 6:1, nos. 92, 96, 105; Although both Sazonov and the Russian admiralty had previously expressed concern for Turkey's growing naval strength, it did not push Russia into closer cooperation with Greece. "Constantinople and the Straits," Krasnyi arkhiv, 1924, no. 11 (7), pp. 32-33.

turned down the proposal.⁹⁴

Conflict did not materialize in the Aegean during 1914. On August 2, the Porte had signed a secret alliance with Germany, but the pact had been directed against Russia, not Greece. In September, the two powers implicitly shelved their dispute. The two sides subsequently retained their claims to the islands, but refrained from using armed force in the area.

The period before World War I had been a most important one in the history of the Aegean question. It had seen the emergence of two well-defined positions. The Greek point, based on the ethnic makeup of the islands, conflicted squarely with the Turkish strategic argument for the security of Asia Minor. The pre-war years had also witnessed repeated intervention by the great powers in a dispute between Athens and the Porte. Both of these patterns would continue to mark the Aegean question during succeeding decades. Yet the tension which gripped the area during those tense days of June and July 1914 would not soon be recreated. The beginnings of war in Europe relegated the question of the Aegean islands to the diplomatic background. The fact that the issue did not lead to war in 1914 may have doomed it to oblivion.

During World War I both Greece and the Ottoman Empire advanced their respective arguments for possession of the Eastern Sporades. The Turks joined the Central Powers early in the conflict, hoping to gain the return of the islands, as well as territories in Thrace and Macedonia. A number of states aspired to shares in the partition of Turkey. Two of these, Greece and Italy, maintained significant interests in the Aegean. Hellenic claims focused on the Eastern and the Southern Sporades. Italian plans included use of the latter group as a base for operations in Asia Minor. Greek officials hoped to use the terms of the 1912 Italo-Turkish Treaty of Lausanne to bring about an end to Rome's "temporary" occupation of the Dodecanese. Yet Italy's persistent search for concessions in Anatolia made it clear that her presence in the area would not be an ephemeral

⁹⁴ MOVEI, 6:1, no. 30; Streit to Politis, Athens to Bucharest 4/17 August 1914, tel., AGFM, A/5, unnumbered; Politis to MAEH, Bucharest, 13/26 August 1914, tel., AGFM, A/5, no.5, Politis to MAEH, Bucharest, 30 August/11 September 1914, tel., AGFM, A/5, no. 22; Panas to MAEH, Istanbul, 25 August/7 September 1914, tel., AGFM, A/5, no. 5720; Romanos to MAEH, Paris, 31 August/12 September 1914, AGFM, A/5, no. 3050.

one.⁹⁵

The adherence of Greece and Italy to the Allies insured for those nations shares in an Aegean settlement. By terms of the August 1920 Treaty of Sevres, the two states acquired title to the archipelago which they had earlier occupied. Through a separate, bilateral agreement Rome ceded all of the Dodecanese except Rhodes to Athens in return for commercial privileges in Smyrna. Rhodes was to remain under Italian control until a plebiscite could be arranged. While the provisions of the Sevres treaty were implemented, those of the Italo-Greek agreement were not. After delaying its evacuation of the Dodecanese, Rome denounced the understanding with Greece in July 1922.⁹⁶

The Italian move limited Athens' possible wartime gains to the acquisition of political title to the Eastern Sporades. For a time, it appeared that the Great War had removed the Turkish presence from the Aegean. Yet the Hellenic military debacle in Asia Minor drastically changed this situation. Sensing victory, the Turks demanded the return of Imbros and Tenedos, the demilitarization of the remainder of the archipelago, and the placement of those islands under a separate autonomous regime. The 1922-23 conference at Lausanne, deliberated at length over the questions. The final settlement, contained in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, restored Imbros and Tenedos to the Turks, but sanctioned Greek political control over the rest of the Eastern Sporades.

In the last analysis, the Aegean was a Greco-Turkish problem. The Greek argument, based on ethnic population of the islands, clashed with the Turkish case, rooted in strategic concern for the security of Asia Minor. These patterns were not unique to the island issue. They would reappear in the Cyprus question of the mid-twentieth century, and the later clash over the right to drill for oil in the waters which lie between the two states.

⁹⁵ Harry N. Howard, The Partition of Turkey: A Diplomatic History 1913-1923 (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1931), pp. 102-04, 141.

⁹⁶ Treaty of Peace with Turkey, Signed at Sevres, August 10, 1920. Cmd. 964, Articles 101-17, 121-22. Great Britain, Treaty Series No. 11(1920).